



Rat Tales

November 2006

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Ballarat Bushwalking and Outdoor Club

PERU TRIP AUGUST, 2006

A phone message from out of the blue started me on a fantastic adventurous holiday. "Pat, Tim has just been offered a teaching job in China would you like to come with me on our planned trip to Peru?" I had to replay the message several times before the reality set in.

On Saturday 19th August I set off with a group of 11 members of the Ballarat Bushwalking club on a three and a half week trip covering many areas of Peru from the Andes to the Amazon Jungle.

There were many highlights but I will focus on a couple. The first thing that struck me after arriving in Lima was the heavy grey sky, you think it is dry here at the moment, it hasn't rained in Lima for 35 years but despite that and the extreme poverty of many of the people there is a contented feel to the city and a great appreciation of the tourist industry which is the second highest income earner in the country after mining.

We soon headed south along the coast to Nasca be greeted by another shock, the terrain was like a moonscape relieved only by the water courses from the Andes, along these streams and springs every type of corn and potatoes - two of the staples of the Peruvian diet - and a great variety of vegetables were grown. The Nasca lines which represent bird and animal shapes have been the centre of much speculation and research they are thought to date to 100 BC to 200AD.

As we ascended in altitude many of us experienced headaches etc but with time these ceased and we were able to appreciate the beautiful Andes with the crafts of the local people always available from wayside stops far from any settlements to the up market Alpaca boutiques of the cities.

Lake Titicaca the highest inland lake in the world allowed us to experience a homestay on one of the many islands. The home was humble with no running water or electricity but the welcome was warm and friendly. The people speak Quechuen rather than Spanish so communication was made possible by a list of words and much sign language and laughter. We were taken to a dance that night. Imagine if you can being squashed

into a traditional costume of a beautifully embroidered blouse, red full skirt all tied together with a corset like embroidered belt, add to this the altitude and top it all off with a vigorous dance with plenty of hip swinging. Needless to say we slept well that night.

The Machu Pichu walk covered 40 kms and took four days. We were assisted by two local guides and many porters. While we gasped along to altitudes of over 4000 metres these porters almost ran past us carrying packs of up to 20 kgs including kitchen and dining room tents, gas bottles, food, our tents and sleeping and much more. We were certainly appreciative of their efforts. The scenery in this area was beautiful not to mention the Inca ruins which was the climax of our walk.

The Amazon Jungle at Puerto Maldonado was also breathtaking, a real garden of Eden with lots of fruit growing there - bananas were 4 for 30 cents and plentiful in many parts of the country. Our lodge was another surprise. One wall of each room was open to the jungle. We were protected in bed by a very secure mosquito net so survived unscathed although my friend Wendy did hear something flying around the room one night. We heard monkeys calling out in the morning and fireflies buzzing through the jungle like miniature torches. We also saw Macaws, woodpeckers and weaver birds with their weird hammock like nests.

Before we knew it we were back in Lima but we had one last visit to make. I had made contact with a friend I had been to school with, she is a Josephite nun and has lived in Lima for 11 years. When I showed Margaret's address to our tour leader she was quite concerned and insisted we leave passports and excess money at the hotel and almost had us convinced that we wouldn't return safely. Undaunted we set off on what ended up being an hour and a half taxi ride into the outskirts of Lima. The conditions there were very poor but neither Wendy nor I felt threatened although it was a little disconcerting when the driver locked all doors and told us to stay put while he went looking for a phone to ring for directions. We were relieved to see Margaret waving at us as we approached a bus stop - the taxi driver was also thankful to unload his strange passengers who had wanted to

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move outside the safe tourist area of Lima. We had lunch with Margaret and she told us about the work she is doing with these poor people of outer Lima. The people move into these very basic houses with no water or power and have little hope of improving their lives, no matter how hard they work. She works with them teaching the children to read and generally giving them hope.

Peru is a wonderful country to visit with such variety of terrain and interesting and ancient cultures.

Pat Kennedy